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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 00120
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DISSEMINATION: POL /1
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1834
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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 6825
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000120

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/24/2015
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH MILITARY TAKES A POUNDING WITH
"SLEDGEHAMMER"

REF: ANKARA 107

Classified By: A/POL Counselor Jeremiah Howard for reasons 1.4(b,d)

1. (SBU) Summary: "Taraf" newspaper broke the newest in a chain of alleged anti-democratic military plots on January 20, a day before the Constitutional Court overturned a 2009 law extending civilian court jurisdiction to military officers (REFTEL). The newspaper claimed the Turkish First Army plotted to overthrow the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government in 2003. Dripping in lurid details of false flag bombings of mosques, deliberate plans to provoke an armed conflict with Greece, the detention of thousands of Turkish citizens, and the establishment of a new government by the military, the story has swiftly become the primary topic of discussion and speculation among the political class and on the street. Although the existence of contingency planning for political intervention by the military is likely, the timing and details of the Taraf release suggest that some of the evidence has been tampered with, fueling counter-accusations of a political agenda on the part of the accusers. End Summary.

2. (U) This newest allegation claims that when he was Commander of the First Army in Istanbul, General Cetin Dogan drafted a 5000-page plan code-named "Sledgehammer" (Balyoz) in 2003 to overthrow the AKP government. In the plan, the military would conduct operations to sow chaos among the Turkish populace -- including bombing mosques and provoking the Greek armed forces to shoot down Turkish aircraft over the Aegean Sea. The resulting chaos would provide justification for the military to first declare a state of emergency, then implement martial law, and then take over the

government. The plan envisioned the detention of an estimated 200,000 Turkish citizens, including named journalists (to be detained in Istanbul sports arenas); the appointment of a government of specifically-named centrist politicians and businessmen; and assignment of military staff to the leadership of banks and ministries. The new administration would then allow the military to govern by proxy, and would then seize the assets of minority foundations, foreign businesses, and companies that had been privatized in the past decade.

¶3. (U) Dogan, now retired, confirmed to the press the existence of military documents focused on internal security, but denied they constituted an action plan. He asserted the documents were the result of a hypothetical tabletop exercise devised to develop possible military responses to political instability in Turkey. The authority to draft such a document, he claimed, was the Protocol on Cooperation for Security and Public Order (EMASYA). Normally employed in urban areas where the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is active, EMASYA allows the military to conduct intelligence-gathering operations without consulting civilian authorities. Dogan said, however, the original document had been tampered with. He claimed the elements calling for the destruction of mosques and provocation of war with Greece are "slanders," which had been edited into the original documents.

¶4. (C) Several military contacts have declined to speak to us about Sledgehammer, but retired Turkish Navy Captain Yilmaz Aklar, who had served in the Turkish General Staff's policy and plans division prior to his retirement, told us the most sensational claims about the plot could not be true. Specifically, it would not have been within the mandate of the First Army to draft an action plan for the entirety of the military forces, and the document being presented as such is outside the capabilities of the First Army alone. First Army would not have had, for example, the authority to order Turkish fighters to dogfight with Greek fighters. Second, Aklar expressed doubt the First Army would have been able to develop a list of individuals to serve in a new government on its own or carry out a change of government from Istanbul. He also noted that many of the names listed as officials in a "new government" were, strikingly, those floated by the media during the recent AKP closure case of persons who might serve in a care-taker government subsequent to AKP's banning.

¶5. (SBU) Rifat Hisarcikoglu, a prominent businessman with potential political ambitions who was to be prime minister according to the Taraf list, told the press he was unaware of the plot and termed it "treason." Similarly, Bayram Meral, a veteran labor leader and member of parliament for the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) who was allegedly the military's pick for Labor Minister, told us the plot was "fictitious and ugly." TGS Chief Ilker Basbug for his part reacted angrily during a military ceremony covered by the media on January 24. He declared the Taraf report false, promised the military would cooperate in any investigation into the alleged plan, but warned again that the military's patience has its limits. (NOTE: Sledgehammer is the latest in a series of sensational allegations of military interventions in the political sphere against which Basbug has spoken out repeatedly, most recently in December, calling them part of a systematic asymmetric campaign to erode public support for the military.)

¶6. (C) Aklar also echoed the refrain the TGS has adopted in the face of each new allegation: The stories are aimed at tarnishing the military's image and weakening public support for what had been the country's most respected institution. He questioned the timing of the report and asserted it is the latest step in AKP's campaign to create popular support to amend the 1982 constitution, which was drafted by the government that took power following the 1980 military coup. He criticized the military's clumsy handling of this most recent allegation, lamenting that the statement the TGS issued was long-winded and led to more questions than answers from the man on the street. He assessed the TGS is losing

the battle for hearts and minds in the court of public opinion and predicted the AKP would succeed in amending the constitution. He dismissed any possibility of the military taking action against the government, asserting that "this is a thing of the past."

17. (C) COMMENT: Some of the Sledgehammer speculation put forward by pro-government newspapers is clearly not plausible. The pro-government daily Zaman's attempt to connect the 2003 bombings of two synagogues, an HSBC bank, and the British Consulate in Istanbul to Sledgehammer planning -- despite no evidence to support such an allegation having arisen during the trial of the ringleader, Luay al-Saqqa -- is an example of the ludicrous claims made by mainstream newspapers. However, the allegation that the military had a plan that could be enacted to force AKP from power is not implausible. The military staff fingered in the Sledgehammer allegation were all highly placed in 1997, when a coalition government led by the Islamist Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan, was forced from power by military-engineered political manipulations. That veterans of the 1997 intervention would prepare a contingency plan to dispense with a similarly ideological government is not at all far-fetched. However, the existence of such a plan does not necessarily imply intent to execute it, let alone intent to bring harm to average Turks in the process. What is clear to us: These sensational allegations are generating doubts among a broad cross-section of Turkish society about the military's constitutionally endorsed secular guardianship role at a time when the Islamist AKP is paving the way for a referendum on an, as yet, undefined package of constitutional amendments.
Jeffrey

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